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Bard

ON BATTLE HILL

Some pipers near you some
harpers happening,
you have come
to the famous place between the worlds
hillside in Wales
and all your blood
moves curious as a spring rill on a sunken lawn
investigating
what is low
what there is to know
to go
because you have come to your moment.

No, it is autumn and your blood is usual
busy remembering,
house in your head, you carry
the street,
the long one,
from which you come.

You do not go into the street to learn the street —
that's the secret city children know, the street
is the space between your eyes and the skies,
is your glance right into the heart of the president, the only one,
up there, in the blue house, god of energy, big you.

The harp is still. You wait
for all its trembling reminders.
How can a sound be gold. How can someone
you love be Aquarius or far away?
Let it be thin — an image
is a paltry trick, you see it,
here, even when it isn't there,

this blessed here of all things,
Our Lady. We kneel to your green shadow,

the whole earth for all its colors
isn't strong enough to bear
even your shadow,
and the worlds below it
reel under your circumstance.

We come to you as our only solution,
our watch stopped, our shoelaces broken,
our books very hard to read,

we hardly know you're there, we're here,
what is that commotion at the other end of the street,
the petite liaisons of our scary afternoons,
all the nimble forgettings,

meritorious castigations of our fugue. So they say.
For we have escaped the bitter bleakest classrooms,
meant to counsel your phony priests to run
back and wash themselves in you, whose purity
of uncontrived attention they forgot,

but we were children and could say nothing but our smell.

For a while now they pipers had been playing
and wise men rose from gold and silver pieces on the chessboard
over which they had been trifling our whole life,

they began to make funny gestures in the air,
flapping their hands and snapping their fingers,
the crows
heard, the crows came (o Mother what does it mean
when you say This afternoon someone will come calling?)

the crows called and called and maybe the wise ones answered
but I heard only crows and I understood,
I moved to the right as they instructed

and then I wasn't a child anymore and wasn't wise and
wasn't a man and wasn't me,
I was all waiting and water, I was attention and being hollow

so whatever happened would make a noise in me

and that would be crow enough for any day,
the harper answered.

Some music comes from touch
and some from speaking
all the words you ever heard at once.

22 October 1994

POSTCARD FROM AMSTERDAM

Vijf, pronounced not quite five,
nothing is quite the way we do it
but it seems, it counts, the big ANB office
gives me —a tad reluctantly,
they are Dutch, it is money— my money

and we are out in the pale winter of the flower market
adoring the promises of earth-reeky paper lumpy bulbs
from which the habitual miracles will spring.
You never have to wait long for a dog
to come along. Narrow sidewalk, luminous canal.

23 October 1994

STAINS

Examine the hairband. See if telltale Prell stains linger. Or if in the barrette a hair or two's still caught in the steel springe or trap behind the soft phony amber. Oh how we have to suffer to be anybody. Slices of lemon once I scrubbed on my young fingers to hide the yellow evidence. Virginia was worst, turkish bad. They were asleep of course, I hoped, and mother had left one almost empty catsup bottle to drain, upside down, into the neck of a new one. Thrift that meant, and memory, and night. I sneaked into my bed, and busied myself with those false hopes we call thinking.

23 October 1994

Red Hook

THE ORDER OF THINGS

A very bisque Nabisco in a plastic sleeve of ordinary
tan light crisp —but not too— tells an overordinary story
like a dromedary in the pasha's tent—

it is time to remember the insightful clerics who proposed
a seductive notation for ars nova music —interpreted
nowadays for the guitar— o it is to
wonder if the cascara-bitter laxative ceremonies of “our”
politics is ever likely to cleanse this world we (complaining
tone) require more of than the usual

whereas that world and that alone
has the mysterious —and glorious—
temptation to be difficult
from which girls' first post-prom pinafores are made
stiff-starched and shadow-shushing as they go

[23 April 1994]
25 October 1994

In one particular the night is soft
and otherwise I thought I saw Orion
through the half-fledged linden tree

and it would be the first time this
season and it would be winter
soon. Or seem. The dead

are not particular, any guise
will answer their pressing need
for being seen. Wait for me

they say to the weather, shape me
they say to the tree
with your shadows and your sudden

nakedness, up there, so the sky
itself seems reticent
compared to you.

25 October 1994

Remain how long ago she was,
the Available, patron saint of what you need,

bright colors on a Mexican calendar
offering hands inside eyes one more embodiment.

26 October 1994

Something happens when you're waiting for someone
and they're out there, out of sight, far down the street
and around a thousand corners, in the night, in tomorrow
wrapped in the sun glare, they're in the moon, alone,
in a throng of evildoers, you're waiting and the waiting
is in your chest, hard, big as a second heart in you and you
feel it, throbbing, pumping the rivers of anxiety
through the whole body and what do you do then?
You wait, and wait harder and harder, you try the other
world, the one that's just here, the ground beneath you,
the wall, floor, doorway they don't come from, the street
empty of anything you need, you try this other unwaited for
world and it's no good, it's not what you want, waiting
is terrible, and your body is no good, your body
is just the place where waiting is waiting, where that wild
alternative heart keeps banging and no one comes.

27 October 1994

D A Y S

Welcome the disappearances. There is a core
of days I understand,
the NET of Karma, SNAKE of suddenness,
malice unveiled abruptly, surprise,
and DEATH the diplomat
exchanging subject populations
from afar.

And then the transfiguration, the priest
naked on DEER day to begin,
then YELLOWCORN, the root fertility,
then earthstorm old JADE
then DOG
intrigue and syphilis.
Then with MONKEY ordinary life begins again,
the days I always forget, days for novelists,
“family and circumstance.”

Now I will tell, if I get around to it,
an anecdote of how Andrews Wanning
asked Robert Lowell a question at dinner:
“Cal, when it comes down to it, isn’t all literature just
family and circumstance?”
(one Harvard old family money man asked another).
Lowell looked at him with that crazy boiled eye of his and
answered by a caveman grunt
conceivably affirmative. And then
months or years later I told this story
(still feeling shock and tumult)
to P.Adams Sitney, he said “Well, isn’t it?”
And I cried out (did I cry out?) like Blake (I’m not in the least
like Blake), No, poetry is glory and revelation and mystery
unveiled, poetry is what no one knows, no one
is given,
it is not
inherited.

If I get around to it
I could tell more, the herniated happenstance, the strained
ligaments of honesty between us then,

and all a mirror's ever worth is to break.
To see the honest paintwork on the wall.

And what am I going to do about that today
while the sun shines
and the sky from time to time fills up with geese,
aliens, legitimated by the local air,
the guns that wait for them down there,
among the Moses-lacking sedges, the broad-splayed water-caltrop
which has chewed up the river.

Bare patch for you, mes oies,
my calendar. And you,
impatient reader,

why burden you with these
commonplace details
of my frail autumn? Because
you too are a leaf and brittle lavender,
a leaf and orange, you
too are a bare tree and need to know

what this wind proposes. There must
be a way out. Behold,
what I have heard on the mountain.

27 October 1994

We have been here before. On this shelf
treading down from the Sierras to the sea,

in between. We are people to whom
a very wise thing happened or got air
then we forgot, or it took itself
away from us inside, and we were now.

Just now. Broken tablets at the feet.
A word
 to share with you —each part
becomes a whole, nourishes indeed
but the meaning changes.

Bus us sin in nine businesses,
the oracle of fraction. Clasis.
Take a bus on our way to business,
sin therein nine times, how so, a sense of skin
curving to meet skin, sine waves,
 endless esses fleeing from a brutal war.
Take a bus in sin to where we live,
the use of us, the frantic readership of signs,

Lear grief and shattered wood,
 a hat full of leaves.

Interlude: Arion, weary of singing
 to indifferent merchant sailors
 hurls himself into the sea
safe from all that local music,
bears him simply to some shore
like a melody from start to finish
by which we recognize: a tune,

someone means this.

And there the youthful ears

28 October 1994

And now we're finished with it,
guide's day coming home to house day,
hiding in the reeds.

*Hiding in the river
from the water.*

We bought this book in Amsterdam,
a little snow dithering the fine steel-engraving evening air
of the famous canals, a cold market street
closed to all autos but Police.

Hiding from people in a city.
Edging nearer to the sluices. Map of subways
real enough beneath a ruined city.

Let things be where they are.

Compromise
with the constellations,
faces face you, they talk, you drive uphill
in a trusty old car,
you see someone's sister. You are surprised
to see her, to see there are stars in the night sky
after all the sleep of cities,
still there,
left over from summer. You name them
and some of them have her name too.

29 October 1994

Every measurement becomes the same.
The antique concept called a house
or fingers or a hermitage. Bed rock
shows through there. Fortress in the sky.
I wanted a walking place in clouds,
a small country that owned all the books,
I wanted postage stamps. So sue me
as God said to the disgruntled priest,
I never said the matter-world would satisfy.
Stone still is hard to lift. If you had asked
I would have told you to go to the place
beyond all this, the mind that makes stone heavy
and makes you want to lift it. That's where
adjustments can be made in these bright
wind-swept busy grail-thronged offices.

30 October 1994

FROM THE INFINITE INDEX FALL 'N

No subtlety in some numbers, there is.

Walking away from temptation, we should be.

Clarity of limning in Great Painting, paucity of.

Hallways leading to other hallways, dream of.

Cheeses, imaginary kinds of fruits and, names.

31 October 1994